

## MEDIA AND SOCIO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the crucial role of the mass media, peculiarly TV and radio, in reversing the burgeoning socioeconomic challenges of Northern Nigeria. It argues that mainstreaming global development initiatives and integrating the specific regional, state and national goals and policies in line with needs and expectations of the people can guarantee their freedom of opportunities and prosperity. It proposes: true democracy, good governance, accountability and transparency, human rights, increased political will and support for community radio for community needs, among others as key enabling environment. It adds that media organizations and professionals need to resist political pressures and interferences to reflect the true feelings and needs of the people; institutionalize investigative/advocacy journalism to expose corruption and mismanagement of public resources by monitoring, criticizing, analyzing and interpreting public budget, expenditure, policy and implementation of global, national and local development initiatives instead of the norm of being appendages of governments. The article suggests further that the media in Northern Nigeria can strengthen their internal competence and ethical capacity for professionalism and adopt peace journalism in coverage of diversity and conflict, in their programming to illuminate the cherished values of the people and to guide and direct social conduct and behaviour for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Challenges; Radio; TV; Illiteracy; Poverty*

## MEDIA DAN PEMBANGUNAN SOSIO EKONOMI DI UTARA NIGERIA

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini membincangkan peranan penting yang dimainkan oleh media massa, terutamanya TV dan radio dalam memulihkan cabaran sosioekonomi Nigeria Utara. Ia mempertikaikan inisiatif perdana pembangunan global dan menyepadukan kawasan, negeri dan tujuan Negara tertentu dan polisi sejajar dengan keperluan dan jangkaan rakyat yang mampu menjamin kebebasan menagih peluang dan kemakmuran. Ia mengusulkan demokrasi sebenar, pemerintahan yang baik, kebolepercayaan dan ketelusan, hakasasi, peluang politik yang meningkat dan sokongan radio komuniti untuk keperluan komuniti, antara yang menjadi kunci pemangkin alam sekitar. Ia menegaskan bahawa organisasi media dan golongan professional perlu menolak tekanan dan campur tangan politik untuk mencerminkan perasaan dan keperluan sebenar masyarakat; membina kewartawanan penyiasat / penyokong untuk membongkar rasuah dan salah tadbir sumber masyarakat dengan memantau, mengkritik, menganalisis dan menginterpretasi kewangan awam, perbelanjaan, polisi dan pelaksanaan inisiatif secara global, nasional dan setempat dan tidak menjadi norma kebiasaan yang hanya bergantung pada kerajaan. Artikel ini seterusnya menyarankan bahawa media di Nigeria Utara boleh mengukuhkan kekuatan dalaman dan kemampuan etikal untuk profesionalisma dan mengangkat kewartawanan keamanan dalam rangkuman diversity dan konflik dalam program mereka untuk menyinarikan nilai yang masyarakat inginkan dan untuk memandu dan mengarahkan sikap dan tingkah laku social pembangunan lestari.

***Kata Kunci:*** *Cabaran, radio, TV, iliterasi, kemiskinan*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is Africa's most populated country with over 167million (NPC, 2012). Its major revenue accrues from an estimated 2million barrels crude oil daily production(OPEC, 2013);and mineral resource deposits in commercial quantities, vast arable land forcultivatingcash and food crops, among others. Yet, the people faces challenges of basic needs – social services still do not reach the poorest, key health interventions in the country is low and neglect of technical

and vocational education has contributed to high unemployment, rising poverty, youth restlessness and stagnated economic and infrastructural development through a dearth of a skilled national workforce (<http://www.sure-p.gov.ng>). Presently, 60.9 percent of Nigerians live in absolute poverty (NBS, 2010). Most people, including youths, who are a very large portion of the population, are still unemployed despite struggling to attain, at least secondary or tertiary education (UNESCO, 2010).

The country has a robust broadcast, print and new media landscape. The print media is dominantly of private proprietorship and their interests are both economic and political. The broadcast media is dominantly public-owned, in governments' control at the federal and state levels. They concern themselves, primarily, with serving the interests of their proprietors. The new media outlets are a mix of both public and private ownership; and have served various social economic and political advocacies, among others.

## **THE NORTHERN NIGERIA**

The challenges of Northern Nigeria are inextricably linked to the country's total situation; but with worse living conditions. Iortim(2012) and Kawu (2012) posit that poverty ravaging the region created turmoil; young people, who are overwhelming majority, live hopelessly. There is deficiency in education; they have no skills and are jobless. Modernity is not working and the various factions of the elite: traditional, religious, political, bureaucratic and economic, are corrupt and disconnected from an increasingly urbanized youth.

Northern Nigeria comprises 19 states of the country's 36. It is inhabited by over 50 percent of the country's 167 million people across 65 percent of the country's 923,768 sq. km land mass. It is home to over two-thirds of the country's 250 ethnic groups. Its vast fertile land is adaptable to a variety of crops, hence a potential for agricultural revolution. But most farming is still subsistent. Iortim (2012) highlight that agriculture is 42 percent of Nigeria's GDP and the North accounts for most of these; yet the region is poor and backward. It is comparatively disadvantaged with weak physical infrastructure as indicated by the country's Human Development Index (UNDP, 2010). Poverty prevalence is high; so are social inequity, maternal and infant mortalities, unemployment, illiteracy, HIV infections and spread, among others (Kawu, 2012; UNDP, 2010; UNDP, 2009; NACA, 2007).

The 2012 Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics' (NBS) data shows the North-West and North-East geo-political zones recorded highest poverty rates of 77.7 and 76.3 percents respectively (NBS, 2010); and alarming illiteracy levels of 86 percent (UNESCO, 2010). The North also has the least annual per capita income, below the national average of N20,000 (\$127). In addition, it has the least industrial presence for absorbing the increasing number of unemployed youths.

The zone thus experiences more conflicts due to poor management of its diversities than other parts of Nigeria. The conflicts manifest as religious, ethnic,

economic, political or value based. The consequences are evidently devastating to the development of the zone that is increasingly stigmatized as a theatre of violent clashes and a parasite that cannot survive without monthly federal allocations. These social inequities have led to religious fundamentalist ideologies and insurgency. There have also been political agitations, veiled in ethnic and religious colorations that have created perpetual insecurity and caused loss of colossal lives and property in almost all parts of the region for some time now. Criminal elements have equally taken advantage of the lawlessness to perpetuate criminal activities (HRW, 2012). Ciroma (2011) add that unemployment and injustice turned the able-bodied army of youthsto restiveness and political thuggery. Facing a bleak future, they resent society and resort to crime and anti-social behaviours.

Northern Nigerian women are also the least educated in the whole world according to a recent report on state of global female education. The report added that there are at least two million children roaming the streets everyday instead of being in school. Northern Nigeria also has the highest record of divorces in the world (Blueprint, Dec. 28, 2011).

## **NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PEOPLE IN NIGERIA'S NORTH**

The North is divided into semi autonomous states in the context of the Nigerian federation. But it is still bound by geopolitical boundary and psychological interests. Northern Nigeria as a geographical entity comprises multiple culturally heterogeneous communities, politically diverse but economically common. There are factors that differentiate the people, but they are united in their desire to conquer poverty and disease, banish illiteracy, establish and sustain good governance and a good life characterized by freedom, opportunities and prosperity.

Considering the complexities in the region, it is advisable to emphasize on the common needs and expectations of the communities in the zone and the country. This is more so that globalization is increasingly opening up communities and eroding hitherto geographical boundaries. Communities across the world now share common humanity with a common fate on a crowded planet. It is also increasingly becoming clear that no community can afford to keep itself away from the contemporary challenges that are experienced at the national and global levels. For example, epidemics like HIV/AIDS, effects of climate change and similar other occurrences can hardly be restricted to one community without the risk of spreading elsewhere. Thus, the needs and expectations of the communities of the zone cannot be divorced from the needs and expectations of other communities in the country.

The dominant need of Northern Nigeria is the aspiration for positive improvement in quality of living, as evident in other parts of Nigeria – the people desire peace, equity and sustainable development which will facilitate

the qualitative upliftment and significant improvement in their lives. Global development practice promotes sustainability and Drexhage and Murphy (2010) conceptualize sustainable development as that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The Northern Nigerian people expect the demolition of all barriers to a tolerable and decent living. Sustainable development, should therefore, focus on the competence and capacity of the people to transform their lives and have firm control over their affairs, environment and resources. It should enable them to expand their choices and opportunities; allow them greater freedom and dignity as human beings. These are the minimum requirements to guarantee citizens' path to sustainable development.

## **MAINSTREAMING GLOBAL INITIATIVES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

Northern Nigerian media organizations need to key-in to global and national efforts to address socio-economic developments of the zone. Their concern should be on how to positively mainstream the North into the ongoing movements towards participatory democracy, improved infrastructural and industrial base, achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), amongst others. The communities of the North need to sow and reap their own seeds of development like elsewhere across the world.

Nigeria is currently a signatory to several international instruments and conventions such as the MDGs (2000), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), Convention for the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) (1979) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), among others. These have been translated into the national agenda at various levels and mainstreamed into the national process and vision. There is also the Vision 20:2020, a road map to propel Nigeria's economy to be ranked among the best twenty economies in the world with a growth rate of 13 to 15 percent yearly up from its current six percent. The country has also developed the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS I and II) to guide the national development process in a systematic and strategic framework. Some states have the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) within the NEEDS framework while some local governments have domesticated the SEEDS into Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS).

The federal government has specifically adopted a transformation agenda for the systematic and timely attainment of sustainable development. The question is: where are the communities of the North situated on the radar of all these agendas and goals? How have they been strategically positioned to partake in the flight to diminish underdevelopment and usher in development and prosperity? How do the media in the zone fit in to the matrix? Have managers and operators of, particularly, government-funded broadcast media defined local agendas within

global contexts and national agendas to successfully navigate the minds and behaviours of their audiences toward newer realities? Are the media sufficiently equipped and mobilized to strategize on how best to buy in to the global and national initiatives for the ultimate benefit of their audiences?

### **ENABLING ENVIRONMENT:**

It may be difficult to experience new realities without creating the enabling environment or harnessing the unbound creative potentials of the communities. The psycho-social and environmental needs of the communities have to be addressed to serve their interests. Some issues which are important to individuals and community are: sustenance of a democratic climate for good governance, peaceful coexistence, transparency, freedom and an enabling environment for personal and societal growth at minimal cost:

**(1) Democracy:** Democracy is globally acknowledged as an outstanding style of governance that promotes the welfare, respect and dignity of man. Democracy provides for, and promotes the active participation of the people in the economic, social, cultural and political processes to guarantee sustainable development. Undoubtedly, Northern Nigerian states need genuine democracy – they want their individual and collective votes to count; they want their voices to be heard; and they want their expectations fulfilled. Media professionals are expected to fully imbibe their changing roles within the context of a transitional society where the burden is to prove that the people can successfully and democratically choose their leaders.

The media and their internal environments must also be democratized in addition to acquiring full understanding of the meaning, essence, principles, institutions, values and challenges of democracy in a diverse federal structure. Here, the media, particularly radio and TV organizations have the duty and responsibility to strengthen the citizens, not to control them; work with them, not to work over them; give them material, psychic and intellectual means and abilities to improve their lives and above all, help to strengthen existing institutions (The Guardian, June 12, 2005). Such efforts should equally strengthen internal democracy in political parties, respect rule of law and due process, promote service delivery and condemn subversive acts like election rigging, thuggery, mandate betrayal and political intolerance. People have insisted that the media should set agenda for politicians and the general public instead of the present trend of operating in line with the agenda set outside the media environment by politicians, business interests, among others (Oso, 2007). The question is: how prepared are the newspapers, radio and television stations in the North to set the agenda?

**(2) Good governance and accountability:** Democracy and sustainable development are impossible without addressing corruption and accountability in governance. For every corrupt practice, a particular community's need is denied.

Today, the military may not be regarded as immediate threats to the democratic process in Nigeria but the destruction of existing social structures, public institutions, abuse of procedures and regulations, undemocratic tendencies, massive looting of public resources, insensitive unprincipled and desperateness of politicians, and personalization of state power and rising level of public frustrations are the poisonous arrows that may cripple Nigeria's nascent democracy.

The level of corruption in the country is enormous; likewise the consequences. For instance, the World Bank had reported that before the return of the country to democratic rule in 1999, about \$400 Billion was stolen by various leaders in Nigeria (Igbuzor, 2008). An erstwhile anti-corruption chief revealed on national television that the Commission had in just two to three years confiscated over N90 Billion (USD 700 Million) of stolen monies from government functionaries who are mostly elected officials. Equally, the Commission reported the misuse or diversion of over N1.6 Trillion meant for the local governments in six states during the period 1999-2007. The quantum of resources stolen from 2007 to date is unknown, but some revelations about monumental corruptions among state governors and heads of parastatals by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) and the National Assembly point that much more have been stolen.

Therefore, communities in the North eagerly expect media organizations, to, in the spirit of investigative journalism, expose corrupt elected and bureaucratic leaders mismanaging or stealing public resources that should have been used to provide motorable networked roads, potable water, electricity, bridges, schools/ conducive learning environment, affordable medicare, security of lives and property. The media in Northern Nigeria will need to strengthen their capacity for investigative journalism in training and equipment. They should know for example, how to track and interpret budgets and expenditures, know how to collate facts and figures; interpret, analyse and explain them in very simple terms, thereby making informed analysis that can empower the people appropriately.

Frankly, the North and Nigeria, cannot earn the confidence and respect of the global community if its image as a zone or nation is that of crookery, dubiousness and dishonesty. When resources meant for development are pilfered or stolen, the society will simply stagnate or deteriorate into decay, hopelessness and instability. The roads will remain dangerously unmotorable; taps will remain dry and darkness will envelop the society. Most worrying too, is that the system appears weak in checkmating the corrupt activities that are glaringly exhibited. Can the media be extricated from this malfeasance of corruption by not being able to effectively engage in investigative journalism? Presently, the media are, as usual, expected to increase their focus in exposing the bad, highlighting the good and working with the citizens to diminish that which harms them and nurture that which empowers and serves them best (The Guardian, June 12, 2005).

**(3) Human Rights:** The people of the North are both desirous and protective of their human rights. Communities in Northern Nigeria expect the media to defend and advance their individual and collective freedoms. Indeed, Sen (1999) advocates that development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom like poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivations, and neglect of public facilities and intolerance of repressive regimes. Without freedom therefore, the human mind can hardly bring out its best. And, it is only when the citizens are able to creatively participate and contribute their best with little violations or blockages to their rights and freedoms that their potentials can be optimized. But when they are threatened by political thugs, oppressed by local leaderships and devastated by environmental and circumstantial poverty, they simply resign in life and consign their fate to the Almighty with little hope of immediate earthly solutions. This is indeed dangerous for the human spirit and has been partly proven to be responsible for the catastrophic turmoil in the region.

It is unacceptable or intolerable in today's contemporary world for states or their agencies to violate or abuse the rights of their citizens. This is why when such violations occur, the international system rises diversely to arrest the situation. In Northern Nigeria too, the media ought to function not simply to guard liberty and freedom, but to encourage more liberty, freedom, democracy, human rights and sustainable development. They must be in the forefront of exposing human rights abuses, condemning perpetrators and remaining vanguards for the defence of the citizen's rights. It is no longer fashionable for media organizations to dance to the dictates of their patrons. The region's radio and TV stations must courageously protect, defend and advance individual and collective human rights.

**(4) The Millennium Development Goals(MDGs):** At the beginning of the Millennium, the global community through the 189 member countries of the United Nations, including Nigeria, pledged to address problems relating to poverty, education, gender equality, infant and maternal health, Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and other diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, the environment and global partnerships for development by Year 2015. These were challenges threatening sustainable development in member countries and Nigeria. To track the MDGs, the UN set 18 targets and 48 indicators to evaluate the progress in the implementation of the goals by individual countries. Northern Nigerian communities are hugely disadvantaged in all the development challenges identified by the eight goals.

Currently, rural areas and states in North East and North West have the worst child mortality rates in Nigeria and in the world. Most causes of high morbidity and mortality among children can be avoided through immunization, increased access to health facilities, use of mosquito nets, better household practices, access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Poor maternal health record in the North



also qualified it as one of the leading non hospitable areas on earth for pregnant women. The statistics are shockingly worrying. Average maternal mortality ratio (MMR) figures are 800 to over 1000 for every 100,000 live births with a life time risk of 1:14-16 (NPC, 2007). Regrettably, the zone is still grappling with the challenges of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases, though there are significant results in fighting and reversing the trend.

Equally, the zone has no good score-card for sustaining its environment. There are critical levels of deforestation, pollution, shortage of housing, waste management, erosion, energy crisis, drying up of rivers and lakes. A common instance is the Lake Chad, which lots of people in the North depend on. It receded to 2,500sq.km from its original 250,000sq.km. These are consequences of climatic change that are dangerously confronting the communities and endangering the future of generations. Even for the eighth Goal on the MDGs List that focuses on developing global partnership for development, communities of the zone are miserably placed on the fringes, with weak infrastructural base particularly in aspects like electricity, road, transport and technology.

Now, to what extent have media organizations in the zone been monitoring the progress and evaluating the successes of the MDGs implementation at the community, local, state and even national levels to ensure that the zone is not disadvantaged or short-changed in this journey? As captured by former Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, the media as an integral part of civil society is not just an indispensable partner in delivering services to the poor at the scope required by the MDGs but it can also catalyze action within countries on pressing development concerns, mobilizing broad-based movements and creating grassroots pressure to hold leaders accountable for their commitments (UN, 2005). The media would have to work harder to earn the trust of communities in Northern Nigeria to fulfil its statutory responsibility of being society's watchdog in this regard.

**(5) Diversity and conflict:** Northern Nigerian region is complex, heterogeneous, multicultural and pluralistic in every sense. Naturally, such a complex and diverse mix will, if poorly managed or irresponsibly politicized, lead to occasional conflict that can be violent. Numerous past, recent or even ongoing examples of such unfortunate conflicts at different levels involving various actors exist. There is an increase in ethno-religious violence, Islamic insurgency and political disputations has created a vicious state of perpetual fear. These literally undermine individual and group understanding and manifestation of trust as the basis of peaceful co-existence and resulting in violent and damaging conflicts with devastating consequences like bloodletting, destructions, hatred, spread of fear and other signals of tense existence thereby promoting disharmony, misery and poverty instead of sustainable development.

From 1976 to 2010, it is estimated that over 100,000 people died and property worth billions of Naira destroyed in the process of ethno-religious conflicts in

Northern Nigeria (Newswatch, Nov 2, 2009). Elaigwu (2004) put the number of such crises between 1980 and 2004 at fifty, which left in their wake political, social, economic and psychological losses and pains. The region has recorded more cases with severe intensity characterised by bloody clashes and massive destructions since 2004 and violence is now a reoccurring decimal in Northern Nigeria. The Islamic insurgency currently threatening the existence of the region after an uprising against constituted authority is claiming lives and destroying property in alarming rates. Presently, three states in the North East are under a state-of-emergency in the region in a military operation to clamp down on Islamic insurgents.

The expectation is: how can the communities live peacefully, appreciating the existing differences and turning the diversity into collective strength. The communities are generally peaceful and they desire and need unlimited peace. Media professionals in the zone need to understand the communities they serve – history, geography, sociology, anthropology, multicultural set up and so on. In fact, with the knowledge of recent unfortunate happenings in many communities, the local media needs to increasingly imbibe the new spirit of peace journalism that stands for the truth as opposed to bias and incitements, lies and propaganda that are often dominant. The peace journalist has eyes for the essential – the devotion both to fact and hope; it takes right training, determination, environment and exposure to institute these elements in the polity. Media proprietors and professionals in the North should be competently equipped with competence to offer the required service of uniting the diverse peoples of the North, in particular and that of Nigeria in general.

**(6) Values:** Values are cherished ideals that guide the conduct of a people. Every community has its values, code of ethics and standard norms and behaviours. Equally, there are shared values that are common to all the communities in the zone. This is further strengthened by their adherence to religious practices of Christianity, Islam or Traditional African religions and their values emphasize: honesty, respect for the elderly, sympathy for the weak/ disadvantaged, courage and dignity of labour, truthfulness, and community spirit. Most cultures in the North also appreciate the place of women, the beauty of children, the sanctity of the family and supremacy of the community.

Today, the culture of materialism and total disregard for appropriate behaviour and decency are eminently displayed with negative consequences. In this respect, the communities have two clear needs: one, they require the media to promote and advance their community values for societal well being; and secondly, they expect operators in the media industry to uphold and reflect the best of the values in their conduct and output in practice. This is why the media must be guided by professional code of ethics to have the moral courage to act as credible watchdogs and whistle blowers instead of compromising and mortgaging their integrity to corrupt officials to the detriment of collective good.

## **SETTING THE AGENDA**

So far, the discussion highlighted few fundamental needs and expectations of communities in Northern Nigeria. These need to be creatively and competently addressed in line with global and national expectations. The media and its professionals are undoubtedly central to any visible development in the states and the country. They are involved in the business of ideas; great ideas that can transform societies. Through the media's collection, processing, management and dissemination of ideas and knowledge, they can create public awareness, increase knowledge, change attitudes, transform behaviour and foster engagement. These are some of the essential elements that influence and energize the society towards growth and development (McQuail, 2006). Great social transformation, all begin with public awareness and engagement (Sachs, 2008). Thus, the obligation of the media is to lead in setting societal agenda based on its constitutionally assigned role in Section 22 of the Nigerian Constitution, which ascribes to the media the responsibility and accountability to uphold government to the people.

Thus, the media should set agenda for the people and leaders through advocacy, continuous engagement and effective dissemination of messages. They should ignite critical thinking and discuss issues to enhance participation in the development process. Even in staunch monarchical states, like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the press is stiffly controlled, it is well-established government practice to gauge public opinion on new issues by starting a debate in the newspapers. At some point, the Saudi newspapers debated whether or not cinemas should be legal for a period of three months, before the King decided that those opposing cinemas were in the majority and banned them (Miles, 2005). That is how a democratic entity should work for sustainable development – by engaging communities to participate in decisions that affect their lives at both the macro and micro levels.

However, while it is expected that the media rise up to the challenge of meeting the needs and yearnings of the diverse communities, it will only be fair to also highlight few of the challenges that may hinder the best of intentions that radio or TV media houses may have in their individual and collective efforts to meet up to the expectations of their communities.

## **CHALLENGES**

The media in the North and indeed Nigeria can play constructive role to strengthen and promote socioeconomic values. Some of the major challenges confronting the media at both the individual and collective levels are internal and external. There is the particular need to reiterate that the people of the North are more heavily oriented to broadcasting than the print media due to cultural orientation, low literacy level and income disposition. It is difficult to find a household in Northern Nigeria without a transistor radio; whether in the rural

or urban areas; even if it is an old relic. A recent study by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that 80 percent of Nigerians have access to radio while more than 95 percent have no access to computer or Internet (NAN Report, Dec 19, 2011). The statistics also show that states of the North are more radio oriented than the other zones, hence the need to focus more on some of the challenges in the broadcast sector, despite their cross-cutting nature:

**(1) Multiplicity of communities and diversity of cultures:** Northern Nigeria is hugely complex with hundreds of ethnic groups, multiple religions and enormous land mass and population. The region shares international boundaries with four different countries of Chad, Benin, Cameroon and Niger. Each state of the zone has an average of two to three radio stations and TV houses. In a few cases, there are newspaper or magazine outfits. But in many states, the ability of their individual broadcast stations to effectively cover their expected areas of operations is severely and frustratingly limited. Consequently, the content of their programmes are hardly reflective of the multiple cultures in their areas of operation. They cannot afford to produce programmes and broadcast regular news in most languages or cultures. Where it is attempted, it is at enormous costs, and the signals are mostly restricted to the state capitals and probably adjoining LGAs. This is a challenge that should be addressed by the respective governments for the broadcast stations to effectively respond to the needs of the communities of the zone and by extension help the governments deliver.

**(2) Weak research base:** Media organizations particularly public broadcast radio and TV stations have very weak, if not zero capacities to conduct public opinion polls or audience surveys. Perhaps, this is just reflective of the attitude of their owners, the governments, who bother less with research that can shape their policies. There is hardly any audience survey or study commissioned by any media house in the zone. Media organizations in Northern Nigeria have also not institutionalized effective research units or departments when ideally, regular data from the consumers of media content can be obtained through audience research to influence programme conception, production and delivery. In this regard, one would expect any station that is actually broadcasting for the people to have adequate data on:

- i. Access of people to media: The issues are: how many people, for example in a state have access to radio/TV sets, newspapers, films, and the Internet? What are their favourite stations? What is the segmentation of the audiences in terms of age, sex, income, political persuasion, and so on?
- ii. Exposure to Message: It may be important for the radio/TV stations to know their audience preferences – who is listening or watching what programme? How would they want the programmes produced and presented? What are their likes and dislikes about specific programmes

and what functions do the programmes serve the people?

- iii. **Credibility of Sources:** If the stations are broadcasting for the people, then, they need to know if the people really believe their messages. What is their individual credibility rating in the minds of members of the community? Credibility is the basis of believability; and believability leads to acceptability and adoption of messages. This is why the radio/TV stations need to know if a listener or viewer believes in them.

**(3) Commercialization:** This is a very serious factor that has undermined the financial capacity of broadcast media houses in Nigeria. Under the guise of commercialization, many governments shy away from funding their media houses, failing to realize that information is a social commodity whose benefits may not be instantly quantified in terms of money. Consequently, many of them are left to the vagaries of market forces in a poverty stricken environment like the North. This policy has undoubtedly affected the capacity and even the desire of the stations to accord any attention to the issues of the communities and the villages. One can hardly see or hear serious, independent and well scripted programmes emanating from the stations except when sponsored by some interests or concerns; and where so, such programmes are often skewed in favour of the sponsors. Even ordinary news stories have to be paid for, thereby undermining the spirit of investigative journalism and professional news judgement. This needs to be critically re-examined.

**(4) Political pressures and interferences:** A silent but serious threat to the performance of the media in sincerely and consistently reflecting the true feelings and needs of the people in the zone and indeed the country is the high level of intolerance exhibited by politicians in government, particularly at state levels. The non-tolerant behaviour of politicians to alternative views or options in the present dispensation is frightening and threatening to the media and the entire democratic process. In such an environment, the public maintain sealed lips and broadcast stations become exceptionally selective on who to feature. Gradually, a culture of silence envelops the states; sycophantic elements rule the media space while honest citizens' recoil into their shells and democratic ebullience takes flight. A culture of resignation, despondency and fear predominates. As a fall out, society degenerates and broadcasting alienates itself from the communities, thus defeating the beauty of democracy and relevance of broadcasting to the local people.

## **THE WAY FORWARD:**

**(1) Community radio for community needs:** The present broadcast media system in the country is elitist, overbearingly controlled and technically and financially incapable to sufficiently meet or reflect the socioeconomic needs of

locally diverse Northern communities. Gaps exist between community needs, performance of their leaders and the extent to which they are adequately and competently represented in the local media. In other countries, they have addressed such challenges through the liberalization of the air waves by granting licenses for community radio stations that are owned and operated by communities for the communities. Here in Nigeria, the operations of community radio stations that could complement the existing structure have been stifled. In all of West Africa, Nigeria remains the only country whose marginalized and underserved communities are yet to enjoy the benefits of community radio. In less endowed countries like Niger, there are 98 community radio stations as at 2006; Mali has 88; Ghana 15; Senegal 14 and Burkina Faso 33, among others (Akingbulu, 2007).

Evidences abound across the world like Miners' Radio in Bolivia, Radio Apam in Ghana, Homa Bay Radio in Kenya and the Radio Khwezi in South Africa, who have adopted community radio regime; and complemented existing structures by addressing specific community needs in the context of the states and the country. Community Radio stations are feasible, viable and advantageous in fast tracking the wheel of participatory democracy and general socioeconomic development in diverse communities like that of Northern Nigeria.

For instance, the South African, Radio Khwezi, set up in 1995 now has over 140,000 daily listenership; comprising rural, underdeveloped and economically disadvantaged community members. Media professionals work together with communities to develop, produce and broadcast quality programming in Afrikaans, English, Zulu and German languages with sound values geared at educating, empowering, mobilizing and uplifting the social, economic and spiritual lives of individuals, families and communities. Their programming reflects the interests of the rural community and is balanced with national and international priorities (Radio Khwezi, 2012).

Before Nigeria's independence, and few years afterwards, when Northern Nigeria was under provincial and native authority administration (Paden, 1986), it was common knowledge that film was used as a medium to ginger agricultural production, especially after 1951 when the textile industries in the United Kingdom were grounded due to global cotton drought. The Northern Nigeria Film Unit was established solely for that purpose, equipped to generate films on cotton production, raise awareness and increase cotton yield among local farmers to revitalize the British textile industries. The locals were used as cast, their natural rural environment were used as sets, their culture and custom were depicted in the scenes and the widely spoken Hausa Language was used as a medium of communication. It succeeded!

Today, Northern Nigeria can adopt similar approach to ginger its huge agricultural potential by producing radio and TV programmes. Adamu (2009) note that the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria's National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS) effectively used local

languages to produce radio dramas, dialogue (interviews), panel discussions, question and answer which impacted greatly on their target audience. Yusof, Ibrahim and WM Wan (2012) also found that the Malaysian government used radio drama series and talk shows, to diffuse messages of development that significantly changed people's perception, attitude and value through role modelling in dramas from the social learning perspective. The drama also became good tools in spreading new policies, subsidies, message and solution of societal problems.

**(2) Increased political will:** The information sub-sector appears to be among the least considered social sector by governments in the zone. This is a costly mistake that the various governments need to amend by demonstrating greater political will through adequate funding, provision of technical capacities, staff development and guaranteeing of conducive operational environments for the various outfits to operate as real media outfits with wide coverage, standard hours of operations and rich and diverse programme content that are reflective of the needs, successes, expectations and challenges of marginalized communities scattered across the North.

**(3) Increased capacities in the media:** Below are some minimum requirements that the various media houses may have to fulfil in order to effectively reflect the needs of their communities in a globalized world, where boundaries are increasingly banishing across cultures and nations. These are:

1. **High literacy level:** A media professional should be able to understand global trends and how they affect the local realities whether as a journalist, programme production crew member or manager. They need to be fully and adequately informed on existing and emerging societal issues to realize the enormity of the various issues and locate the responsibility of their domain in the system. Unfolding events are increasingly proving low tolerance for illiterate media professionals whose limited understanding of issues confuse the people instead of educating, informing, mobilizing or even entertaining them. This is why curricula of media programmes in educational institutions in the country must also be re-examined in line with global communication studies and journalism practices. The tutors need to be re-equipped and updated on modern teaching methods and techniques to ensure that students of media and journalism schools are not bogged with outdated, irrelevant and contextually useless ideas.
2. Closely related to the above is the need to have media persons who are well travelled in and out of their states, Nigeria and even beyond. There is no substitute to seeing extreme poverty or deforestation or the destructive forces of nature. There is no substitute for meeting and engaging with people across cultures, religions and regions to realize

that we are all in this together (Sachs, 2008). Today, a lot of media contents portray abundance of illiteracy about Nigeria, its politics, geography, history, etc. Perhaps, that is only a reflection of the level of degeneration in knowledge of current affairs about the nation by the citizens as beautifully and sadly reflected on the popular TV reality show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* on the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) network. Most participants are illiterate and ignorant about fundamental Nigerian historic, political, social, educational and economic antecedents and facts. Sadly too, media outputs such as news, features, entertainment, news analysis and commentaries found in the print, broadcast and new media have also shown that the media professionals are themselves not better informed about the nation.

3. The media and its professionals in the North should be additionally strategic in their thinking and operations to be increasingly relevant in the process of sustainable development. Ties with the civil society sector, the international system, educational institutions, relevant government agencies, women bodies, etc should be strengthened. This will equip them with relevant information for their publics on regular basis instead of being cliff-jumpers, episodic journalists or producers. Equally, doing so will open accounts of goodwill that will serve them well in times of need.
4. Understanding and appreciating the major targets of the MDGs.
5. Understanding and appreciating the relevance of communication technologies. The reality is that, this is not the era of analogue journalists or analogue media managers. This is the time for participatory and people-centred journalism carried out in digitized environments by digitized media professionals and supported by modern managers who think digitally. As it is, the environment in several media houses needs to be improved through the sustenance of functional libraries, Internet connections and provision of information technology facilities. It is always disheartening and quite retrogressive to see newsrooms across the country, especially in broadcast stations, grappling with outdated rickety typewriters and analogue gadgets. Are the staff and managements of such organizations in the 21st Century or still in the 1960s? How can these professionals facilitate Nigeria's liberation from the shackles of poverty, oppression and injustice?
6. A better appreciation of the sources of media power by the professionals themselves will enhance their professional confidence, drive and credibility. The point is that media professionals, through continuous capacity building, will better appreciate their sources of power usually referred to as psychological, structural, social and constitutional for them to significantly maintain the required level of confidence and will power



to perform. With such understanding, they can easily overcome petty fears, dictatorial tendencies and stand firm in the line of duty.

## **CONCLUSION**

The media and its professionals are crucial in addressing the socioeconomic challenges that are bedeviling Nigeria's Northern region. But the media do not hold the key to satisfying the needs and fulfilment of the people's expectations. They are facilitators of the process and teachers of social action. Northern Nigeria, like other parts of the country, will not be saved from the shackles of poverty, unless visionary leadership emerges to harness and judiciously utilize the region's abundant resources. Thus, the key to Northern Nigeria's freedom from poverty are the political and bureaucratic elites who control the budgets, formulate and implement policies.

## **BIODATA**

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